DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 825 UD 023 480

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TITLE Parental Influence on the Educational and Career Decisions of Hispanic Youth.
INSTITUTION National Council of La Raza, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE May 82
NOTE 14p.; Prepared at the Hispanic Youth Employment Research Center.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Aspiration; Blacks; Educational Attainment; *Expectation; *Hispanic Americans; *Occupational Aspiration; Parent Aspiration; *Parent Influence; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; Socioeconomic Status; Whites; *Youth
IDENTIFIERS High School and Beyond (NCES)

ABSTRACT

Hispanic American youths' educational and career aspirations and expectations and parental influence on these attitudes are the subject of this study. Variables studied include parent status items (occupation, education, income). Comparisons among Hispanic subgroups (Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latins) and among Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites are also made. Findings, based on data from the High School And Beyond Longitudinal Study, show that minority youths' aspirations and expectations are lower than those of young Whites. Moreover, Hispanics rank below Blacks on these measures. Within the Hispanic community, Puerto Ricans have the lowest aspirations/expectations followed by Mexican Americans. Cubans seem to have the best self-image and the most confidence in their ability; they also have the highest socioeconomic status of any Hispanic subgroup. Family status plays a role in the formation of youth aspirations/expectations. Less educated parents tend to have children with lower educational expectations (in spite of high aspirations). Highly educated Hispanic parents have higher expectations for their children's education and career plans than do less educated parents. Hispanic mothers have greater influence on their children than Black and White mothers and fathers. Cuban parents, in particular, have the highest aspirations for their children, followed by Mexican American parents; Puerto Rican parents have lower aspirations. (CMG)

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PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER DECISIONS OF HISPANIC YOUTH

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May 1982

UD023480

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER DECISIONS OF HISPANIC YOUTH

by Lizanne Fleming

I. BACKGROUND

This collection of data on youth educational and career decisions was carried out in response to a request from the staff of Project Salud, a NCLR health careers counseling project funded by the Office of Health Resources Opportunity in the Department of Health and Human Services. The project is designed to test a model which establishes a network among Hispanic community-based organizations, school systems, and universities to encourage Hispanic high school seniors to pursue health careers.

When the project was evaluated at the end of its first year of activity, the only project objective which had not been fully met was one concerning parent involvement. NCLR and its affiliates found that while parents were interested in their children's progress, they often did not attend the seminars or other project activities. In redesigning the program for continuing operation, project staff decided it was necessary to rethink expectations for parental involvement. It was necessary to determine whether the parental involvement might have been low because the assumptions made about such involvement were incorrect. Thus the project staff and evaluators approached the staff of the Hispanic Youth Employment Research Center and requested data on parental and other influences on Hispanic career and education decisions. It was hoped that this information would help explain whether project expectations had been unrealistic.

Research was carried out using data from the High School and Beyond (HS&B) Longitudinal Study. The survey includes 58,250 individuals (of whom 6,700 are Hispanics), with data from high school seniors and sophomores collected in 1980. Items selected for study addressed youth

aspirations and expectations, and parental influence. Since the Saiud project operates in two large cities with largely Chicano populations, differences among Hispanic subgroups -- and detailed information on the Chicano subsample — were considered. In addition, since the project serves disadvantaged youth primarily, data were sought on the influence of income level and other family status factors (parent education and occupation). Comparisons among Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites were also obtained.

Current research indicates that parent socio-economic status, education and occupation affect children's academic performance, duration of education, labor force experience, and attitudes. Furthermore, evidence suggests that families are influential in encouraging young people to continue in school, and that family role models and connections can increase a young person's opportunities in the job market.[1] These findings have special implications for Hispanics, who have a lower median age (22.1 years) and have completed fewer years of schooling than the Black or White population. Parental influence is of special importance for Hispanics, since both Hispanic youth and adults suffer from the problems of undereducation, high unemployment and dropout rates, and low occupational status.

II. The HS&B HISPANIC SAMPLE

The Hispanic sample is broken down into four subgroups: Mexican-American (54%), Cuban (6%), Puerto Rican (13%) and Other Latin (28%), and is divided fairly evenly between males and females. The age of the respondents ranges from 13 to 21 years with the majority between the ages of 15 and 17. The majority of respondents were born in the mainland

United States (Mexican-American - 89%, Cuban - 51%, Puerto Rican - 77% and Other Latin - 82%). Hispanics in the sample are located throughout the country with highest concentrations in the Mid and South Atlantic, Pacific and West South Central regions.

Parent education is limited. Fifty percent of the mothers and fathers in each Hispanic subgroup have a high school education or less. The number of parents who have completed an undergraduate college education and/or have attained a higher degree falls below 10% in each Hispanic subgroup. "Other Latin" fathers are the most highly educated compared to those in other subgroups and Cuban mothers have more education than other Hispanic mothers.

With the exception of Cuban fathers, over 60% of the respondents reported that their fathers had spent all their lives or more than 20 years in the U.S. The percentage was similar for mothers, with Mexican-American and Other Latin descent mothers especially likely (over 70%) to have spent most of their lives on the U.S. mainland.

Family income varies among different subgroups. The greatest number of Mexican and Puerto Rican respondents reported a family income of $7-12,000. The highest response for Other Latins was in the $12-16,000 bracket and for Cubans, $20-25,000. Puerto Ricans have the highest percentage of families with incomes under $7,000 (24%).

For the purpose of this study, cross-tabulations were created which listed youth expectation/aspiration variables by: (1) parent status items (occupation, education and income), (2) ethnic groups (Black, White, Hispanic), and (3) Hispanic subgroups (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Other Latin).

III. ASPIRATION/EXPECTATION VARIABLES BY PARENT STATUS ITEMS

Responses in the HS&B survey were examined to explore the relationship between family status and youth aspirations and expectations. A cross-tabulation of youth career aspirations at age 30 by parent occupation shows that children with parents in professional fields have slightly higher aspirations than those with parents in labor intensive or service occupations. The majority of youth, however, aspire to hold professional positions regardless of their parent's occupation (The survey divides professional positions into two categories: (1) Professional 1 = accountant, artist, engineer, social worker, etc.; (2) Professional 2 = lawyer, doctor, dentist, professor, etc.) The only exception is youth with parents in farming occupations, who have lower aspirations than all other youth.

When considering parent educational level, the data show that the majority of youth wish to have a professional position at age 30 regardless of their parents' education. A greater percentage of youth with highly educated parents wish to teach than youth in other categories. Higher percentages of youth with undereducated fathers (less than high school) have lower aspirations than other youth, yet the highest percentage in this category still wish to hold professional positions.

School <u>expectations</u> reflect the level of parent education more closely than career <u>aspirations</u>. When asked how much schooling they <u>expect</u> to get, only 19% of youth with parents having less than a high school education reported that they expect to graduate from college. This compares with over 60% of those with college-educated parents (4-5 years

of college) who felt they would earn a college degree. A higher percentage of youth with well-educated fathers (Masters, Ph.D or other advanced degree) expect to earn an advanced degree than youth with less educated fathers.

When checking school expectations against parent occupation, the youth response is predictable. Greater numbers of youth with professional parents expect to graduate from college than those with parents in lower status jobs. That percentage is substantially higher for youth with professional mothers, 44% of whom expect to obtain professional jobs themselves, as compared to 26% of youth with professional fathers.

IV. ASPIRATION/EXPECTATION VARIABLES BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

The occupational aspirations of Hispanic, Black and White youth at age 30 are similar. Close to the same percentage of youth from all three groups want to hold professional positions, although Hispanics have the lowest percentage, at 23%, compared to 27% for Blacks and Whites. Categories in which larger discrepancies exist are: (1) clerical, (2) military, (3) farmer, (4) managerial/ administrative. More minority youth aspire to clerical and/or military positions than White youth; the same percentage of Whites and Hispanics wish to be in farming, 27%, compared to .5% for Blacks, and fewer Hispanics (5%) wish to be managers and administrators than Whites or Blacks (7% and 8%, respectively).

When asked how much schooling they expect to get, the three groups gave responses which varied most in regard to high school and college graduation. Fewer Hispanics expect to get more than a high school education than Blacks or Whites; 24% of Hispanic youth said they will

complete only high school, compared to 20% of Whites and 16% of Blacks. Nineteen percent think they will graduate from college, compared to 26% of Whites and 24% of Blacks. Figures are similar for Hispanics and Blacks in the lower educational categories and similar for all three groups in the higher educational categories.

More Blacks and Whites feel that they definitely have the ability to complete college than do Hispanics (50% of Blacks, 49% of Whites, and 37% of Hispanics). A higher percentage of Hispanics responded that they are doubtful about their ability and more answered that they definitely do not have the ability to finish college. In general, Hispanics seem to be the least confident in their ability to graduate from college.

A few parental influence items were selected for comparison among ethnic/racial groups. About equal percentages of Whites and Hispanics responded that fathers influence their high school plans, but for both groups, mothers are reported to have a greater influence on plans than fathers. Forty-nine percent of Hispanic respondents said their mothers influence them a great deal, compared to 40% of White respondents. Fathers, friends and relatives are influential but to a lesser degree. Least influential are teachers, counselors and military recruiters, although Hispanics and Black youth felt teachers and counselors influence their plans to a greater extent than reported by White youth.

Parents of Black and White youth are more likely than Hispanic parents to hope that their child's post-high school plans include college. For Hispanics, friends and relatives are more likely to hope the youth will go into trade school or the military following high school than the friends or relatives of White youth. In addition, minority youth

are more likely to feel that their guidance counselor hopes that their post-high school plans will include trade school or the military. The Hispanic responses indicate that Hispanics receive more encouragement to pursue lower-status occupations than do Blacks or Whites.

V. ASPIRATION/EXPECTATION VARIABLES BY HISPANIC SUBGROUP

A series of cross-tabulations were examined to pinpoint differences and similarities among four Hispanic subgroups (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Other Latin).

Occupational aspirations are similar for all Hispanics in terms of the type of position they would like to have. The highest percentage of each group desires to have a "professional 1" position. There are fairly large discrepancies, however, in the number of respondents within each group who responded in this way. Cuban respondents have the highest percentage with 31%, followed by 27% for Puerto Ricans and 22% for Mexicans and Other Latins. Career choices are similar for most groups with the exception of military and teaching occupations. More Puerto Ricans wish to go into the military or become teachers than youth in the other subgroups. For high level professional careers (doctor, lawyer, dentist, etc.), Puerto Ricans and Mexicans are the least likely to have such aspirations (9% and 11%, respectively, compared to 18% of Cuban youth).

Educational expectations among the three groups show responses similar to those regarding occupational aspirations. Almost all at least 99% of those interviewed in all subgroups expect to finish high school. More Puerto Ricans than youth of other Hispanic origins feel they will

complete only high school (27%), followed by Other Latin (26%) and Mexicans (24%). Only 12% of the Cubans responded in this way. In all categories of educational attainment, more Cubans expect to get a maximum amount of schooling than those in other groups. The percentage in each group who expect to be college graduates or to obtain degrees are as follows: Cuban - 55%, Other Latin - 37%, Puerto Rican - 35%, and Mexican - 34%. More Cubans feel they will earn advanced degrees than other Hispanics, nearly one-third of Cubans (33%) expect to earn graduate degrees. Proportions are much smaller for other groups: 21% of Puerto Ricans, 17% of Other Latins, and 15% of Mexicans.

More Cuban and Puerto Rican youth feel they have the ability to complete college than Mexican and Other Latin respondents. Nearly as many Puerto Ricans as Cubans responded in this way, which is interesting in view of Puerto Ricans' lower educational expectations. As noted previously, fewer Puerto Ricans feel they will actually attain more than a high school education. Mexican youth rank the lowest in terms of feeling confident in their ability to finish college, although the two categories with the highest Mexican response--"yes, probably" and "not sure"-- reflect an uncertain rather than definite attitude about their ability to succeed. The majority of Puerto Rican youth either feel they definitely do or definitely do not have the ability to complete college; very few are uncertain.

To determine parental influence, respondents were asked what parents want them to do after high school. More mothers than fathers across all Hispanic subgroups want their children to attend college, although both parents want that option above all others (full-time job, trade school,

military, etc.). More fathers want youth to enter trade school than mothers. Cuban youth have the highest percentage of parents who want them to attend college, followed by Mexican, Other Latin and Puerto Rican youth. Cuban mothers have the highest educational aspirations for their children, followed by Mexican, Puerto Rican, and finally Other Latin mothers.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Data collected from the HS&B survey for Project Salud support the findings of other studies which focus on the characteristics and problems of disadvantaged youth. The aspirations and expectations of minority youth are lower than those of young Whites. Moreover, Hispanics rank below Blacks on these measures. Within the Hispanic community, Puerto Ricans have the lowest aspirations/expectations followed by Mexican-American youth. Cubans seem to have the best self-image and the greatest amount of confidence in their ability. Cubans also have the highest socio-economic status of any Hispanic subgroup. Family status plays a role in the formation of youth aspirations/expectations. Less educated parents tend to have children with lower educational expectations (in spite of high aspirations). Highly educated Hispanic parents have higher expectations for their children's education and career plans than do less educated parents. Hispanic mothers have greater influence on their children than Black and White mothers and fathers. Cuban parents, in particular, have the highest aspirations for their children, followed by Mexican-American parents; Puerto Rican parents have lower aspirations.

Linked with other findings on the factors influencing the educational and career decisions of youth, the data generated for this study identify the weakest links in the chain of relationships that can make or break a young person's educational or occupational achievement.

In a series of studies conducted by the Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment, a minimal amount of attention was given to the effects of sociological factors compared to economic factors, yet at the family/community level changes can be implemented with a great chance of achieving success or at least of making an impact, because these actions affect the source of the problems directly. Regarding these sociological factors, a report by the Vice President's Task Force states:

> Most youth enter teen years with a developing awareness of the world of work. Their families are work oriented, likely having a male and secondary earner. Friends and relatives talk about their jobs and careers. Reading materials, adult interactions and tha like are a source of career education. Values are incalculated which will make the youth acceptable in the labor market. In sharp contrast, youth from poor families are likely to enter the teens with a limited understanding of career options. He/she hasn't had experience looking for work because odd jobs have not been readily available. There has been limited socialization to the demands of the workplace. The result is that the disadvantaged youth starts off at the labor market threshold with a deficit which results in a higher rate of failure, delay in successful entry, and sometimes lasting alienation and fear.[2]

Furthermore, when parents have little education, and especially when they do not set a high value on preparation, work, and saving for future rewards, young people may lack family psychological support to stay in school.[3] Even where such parental <u>aspirations</u> for their children are high, <u>expectations</u> tend to be low. Thus Hispanics parents are potentially important in influencing their children's educational and career choices, and efforts to raise their expectations for their

children are an important component of any program seeking to encourage Hispanic youth to seek higher education and professional careers.

FOOTNOTES

1. Justin Farr Rodriguez, "Youth Employment: A Needs Assessment," The Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment, A Review of Youth Employment Problems, Programs and Policies, vol. 1, January 1980.

2. Robert Taggart, "The Youth Employment Problem: A Sequential and Developmental Perspective," The Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment, vol.1, January 1980.

3. Justin Farr Rodriguez, op. cit.